The JFK probe deepens as the list of suspects and witnesses grows.

Assassination Assignation: Captain Sam On the Death of a President

by Dick Russell

We begin with this casual remark from an ex-mercenary named Gerry Hemming: "You couldn't walk down the street in 1963 without running into some kind of a conspiracy. I'd guess my group had about two dozen offers to hit the President—from organized elements with financial backing, inside the United States. And I don't doubt that a half-dozen or a dozen people out there today are still convinced it was they who financed the Dallas job."

Gerry Hemming, a Miami resident who once trained a private army of anti-Castro Cuban exiles in the swamps of the Everglades, is certain of only one thing: if Lee Harvey Oswald really killed John F. Kennedy, it was only because "he got there first." The lone puzzling question, as far as Hemming is concerned, is not who killed JFK but who didn't *?*

Before the year is out, a new 15-man Senate committee will begin studying that question in the first major official investigation of the assassination since the Warren Commission reached its lone-assassin conclusion in 1964. What it will find is anybody's guess—though the committee will certainly scrutinize the actions of the FBI and CIA, both of which kept a lot of secrets from the Warren Commission. But if the Senate chooses to start issuing subpoenas, it will have an intriguing crew on its hands. That much I can say from personal experience.

About six months ago, taken with the bug of the Great Assassination Revival, this mild-mannered reporter set forth on an odyssey in search of Poe's "mystery all insoluble," tracking the mysterious collection of men whose names have long been whispered among assassination buffs: mobsters and mercenaries, dictators and diabolists, priests and perverts, spyers and liars.

This is the story of one of them, a former CIA contract employee who claims not only to have known Lee Oswald, but his double, and who has threatened my safety should I reveal his real name.

Here, then, is the way life is when a mild-mannered reporter elects to cross the border into the realm of cloak-and-dagger. Whether there is substance to these tales, only time and a new investigation will tell. For now, you may be the judge.

PHOENIX—"I've kept quiet 15 years." The words escape in a husky, Andy Devine-like whisper from the man behind the desk. He even looks somewhat like Devine: a chinless, beguilingly soft face, and upwards of 250 pounds on a five-by-nine-foot frame. By his own admission, he's gained almost 100 pounds since his days as a contract employee of the Central Intelligence Agency. Now, as I ask him to recall those days, his voice cracks with apprehension and his hands tremble.

I shall call him "Captain Sam." That's the name he says he used while training anti-Castro exiles in Florida for another invasion attempt of Cuba. If I use his real name, "payback is a bitch," to borrow his favorite phrase. If anyone ever asks, he will deny meeting me.

We are sitting behind the closed doors of an Arizona lawyer's office whom he serves as a licensed private investigator. My visit had come as a surprise. He was aware of only one assassination researcher—an ex-newspaperman in Texas—who knew how to contact him. He's reluctant to say anything. The only compelling reason to go public with his story, he says, is that people are still dying for what they know about the events of November 22, 1963. And Captain Sam would like to know who's eliminating them.

"There's only one reason I'm alive," he says, lighting a cigarette to steady his nerves. "Because I've squirreled away enough sensitive information about intelligence activities for immediate release if anything strange happened to me. But there's no way I'd ever testify about any of this. No way. Payback's a bitch."

What if you and I flew to Washington tonight and had the Senate grant you immunity? I suggest. Captain Sam shakes his head. "There are many ways to discredit someone," he says.

From everything I'd been able to learn about him, Captain Sam's CIA connections seemed real. He had a long history of association with Cuban exiles in Florida, including the notoriously violent CIA-backed group called Alpha 66. From 1961 to 1964, while rumored to be in South Africa, he had actually worked quietly in Florida using a variety of code names. One of his assignments, it's been said, concerned Lee Harvey Oswald.

"Look, if I talk to you," he is saying, "there's one thing you should know from the start. Half of what I'll tell you might be truth, and the other half bullshit. But all of it is what I was told. That's part of the game in the intelligence business. You confuse your own operatives with false information; maybe *nobody* knows the full truth about a particular assignment. Okay?"

I nod.

"Okay," says Captain Sam, "come with me."

We pass through the doors of the outer office toward his waiting car. It's a 90-degree scorcher in Phoenix. "We're having some problems," he says, "with some process servers trying to get to a couple of clients of ours from Kansas City. They're watching this office, but don't know where their hotel is. So we're probably going to be followed. I'm on my way downtown, acting as a kind of decoy. Later, we'll pick these people up at their hotel. We won't be able to talk when they're with us. But we can talk now, and you can take notes but I don't want any tape recorders. Is that understood?"

Through the mid-afternoon traffic on the outskirts of the city, he begins to weave his tale. "I know Lee Harvey Oswald was employed by the CIA, and I know there were two Oswalds. It gets confusing even to me; you'd figure it's something that would come out of a movie. Because I've spent many a sleepless night trying to figure this shit out, and I'm not certain which Oswald was which. Tom Kane of New York City was picked as his double, although that may not have been his real name. He was almost a dead-ringer, except a little taller and there was more meat on him. Oswald had no chest. Tom lost a lot of weight trying to make up for it, but he never could do it in the chest area."

But why was it necessary? I ask. Why two Oswalds?

"We'd been plagued with an intelligence leak. The agency, including probably the State Department and Military Intelligence, was just getting killed with a high-level intelligence leak. With Cuban affairs, everybody knew who we were and what we were doing almost before we did. They got our *orders* before we did. So Oswald and Tom Kane were part of a penetration team directed against Castro's intelligence to find out where that leak was coming from. It was coordinated somehow so that if one of the two disappeared, we'd have something to go on. It really had nothing to do with a plot to assassinate the President. Not at first. I was part of that penetration.

"There were five of Castro's people at an initial meeting, waiting for Oswald to return from Russia, in an apartment building on 99th Street in New York. He'd already managed to connect up with Castro's intelligence. The group believed I was working for Castro's intelligence. I fed them a lot of good information. I was told to, and it probably cost a lot of lives. I met with Oswald alone in New York—except I don't know if it was really him or Tom Kane—and I made a report to the FBI in New York City. They claim there are no copies of that report, but that's a lie. I talked on two occasions to an FBI expert on Latin-American countries."

We are parked across the street from a Phoenix skyscraper. Captain Sam scrutinizes the double doors. "I'm going to have to go inside here for a minute," he says. "Need to make a phone call." Almost immediately upon his return we pull out again. "We should lose them now. Can you drive?" I nod. "When we get to this hotel, I'll go inside for my clients. You take the car and just keep circling around the block, okay?"

Circling, circling. Everything seems to be going in circles.

At last, after a half-dozen tries, he emerges with a middle-aged man and his teenaged son. I turn my notepad face down on the seat. Captain Sam introduces me as his partner. The clients from Kansas City are involved with an Arizona Indian tribe in a squabble over property rights and Captain Sam doesn't think it's safe for them to return to their hotel. After dinner we drive them to the home of a friend of his, where they will spend the night on the couch.

"I'd like to hope the agency had a major fuck-up, but I don't know," he is saying now. We are driving again through the darkened streets, aimlessly driving as I scrawl his words into my notepad. "I do not really feel in my heart that the agency assassinated Kennedy or had anything to do with it. With some of the evidence, I've really thought of it as a probability, but in my heart I refuse to believe it."

The key part of the Oswalds' penetration effort, he emphasizes, was to discover the source of an intelligence leak. The possibility that Castro would assassinate Kennedy seemed remote. It was discussed, but never taken seriously.

"I mean, we had that one group infiltrated by four or five different agents. I actually had several meetings with the Cubans where an assassination was discussed. That was in 1962, with Oswald. Nobody really took an interest in it, other than the people involved. Everybody else's report was—nothing to worry about. I reviewed quite a few of these reports personally. We felt Castro was using this kind of talk as a screening operation for something else."

Captain Sam pauses for a long moment at a stop sign. There is no traffic in sight. He is looking down, looking through the steering wheel, staring at nothing. I try to read his features, but cannot. Suddenly, he looks up and again begins to drive.

"Oswald called me the night before the assassination took place. At least it sounded like his voice. I was in Tipton, Indiana, with my family. I'd dropped out of things for a while, because I was catching too much heat from the FBI. I'd still see reports, but that was about it. The FBI really did a severe surveillance of our people, believe it or not. It really messed us up. But anyway, he called me and he was in a frenzy. He said, 'I can't get hold of anybody, can't contact anybody, they're going to kill him tomorrow.' I said, 'Don't worry, it's all taken care of.' Everybody else thought it was a bullshit deal. The agency had known the hit date 10 or 12 days beforehand, but nobody believed it. I guess I was like everyone else. I figured he had to be wrong. But Oswald was the only one who nailed it to the head. Maybe that's why he was killed."

His voice sounds distant, almost hollow. I am thinking there must be a sign, a hint, a change in intonation, something that might reveal whether this strange and remarkable story is true. But it doesn't come.

"I'll drop you off at your hotel," says Captain Sam.

He agrees to meet me once more. The next day we have lunch in a shopping center near his office. We sit at a corner table eating hamburgers. He is drinking bloody Marys.

"Under Oswald's report—and there's nothing to indicate he was wrong—there were three gunmen. I don't know their positions, other than the fact that I remember seeing the word snapscope. That would indicate a below-ground-level placement for one of the gunmen."

But why didn't the CIA simply get rid of them? I ask.

"Dead men tell you nothing. You're always after the guy above until you reach the top. You stop them, you give the game away. The CIA is not a law enforcement agency, it's not interested in busting people. It's intelligence."

Those words seem a contradiction to the revelations of recent days, but I say nothing. He sighs. "Look, it's like this. Even if a CIA man is standing next to the guy who actually shoots John Kennedy, he would not be in a position to do anything. It would depend on the individual whether he'd try to stop it. We lose men in the field every day. In the eyes of the CIA, a President is no better and no worse. It was a bad deal, everybody's sorry, but when you get right down to it, we didn't lose a great man, we lost another American.

"It really gets confusing. A lot of the stuff I saw, I don't know which Oswald they're referring to. But I know it didn't end with Kennedy's death. A lot of people started getting killed. Maybe Castro hit Kennedy, and this is something else. Whoever and whatever it is, it's a very effective method."

Suddenly, my head seems to spin. I stare at him—the Andy Devine face, the burly frame—but he looks out of focus. Everything seems to be going in circles.

"I don't think I have any more questions," I say.

"As you go along, you'll find a lot of people nobody knew about," says Captain Sam. "A lot are dead, a lot in insane asylums, a lot won't talk. But there are lots of people more interesting than me around. I'm just a small fish." □

Park Police Bust Agents to Test CIA's Intelligence

by Joseph Volz

WASHINGTON—Last January, John Blake, Deputy Director of the CIA, and Kent Frizzell, Undersecretary of the Department of the Interior, signed a vague two-page letter. The two agencies thereby entered into a top-secret pact. The United States Park Police, which normally guards the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, and other such sensitive buildings, would help train CIA agents.

As Blake's aides apparently explained it to Park Police Chief Jerry Wells, the agency needed a place for "stress" training. It was all well and good to train agents or officers at CIA bases, but all involved knew it was just a game. The Park police could add a touch of reality. As male and female CIA teams crossed into Washington from CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, they would be nabbed by Park cops at some remote spot. And, lo and behold, the police would discover drugs on the intelligence students. The chemicals had been planted, of course, but a drug rap is for real.

Naturally, it wasn't for real. The cops would take the trainees down to police headquarters and try to break the CIA-supplied cover story. If the trainees cracked under interrogation and admitted their CIA connections they were flunked. No jail. Just no job.

But my own agents claim that one policewoman never quite got the message that she was part of the off-campus training program. She grabbed a female CIA agent, stripped her down, and made a real—and probing—search for drugs. The would-be spy apparently became hysterical, blowing her cover.

All of which was disconcerting to a number of police officials, who contended Wells should never have gotten involved in the program. Their concern was twofold: someone might get hurt, and there was the chance of a flap if the secret semester in the parks was discovered by an outsider with no "need to know." Wells ordered his men not to talk to reporters. One detective, reportedly a program participant, went a step further by vehemently denying to me that he ever heard of the program almost before I could explain to him what it was he was supposed to be denying.

CIA training missions are not barred by President Ford's executive order of last February intended to check domestic spying abuses by the agency. Although the CIA is no longer allowed to train police, there is nothing that says the police can't train the CIA.

But some ex-CIA agents label this type of training "Mickey Mouse," and contend it often resembles activities former CIA Director Bill Colby's suburban Maryland Boy Scout troop might be engaged in.

Some examples:

The Richmond, Virginia, Bugging Exercise, circa 1960. A CIA instructor, posing as a Navy captain, and his "girlfriend" are in a hotel room. There is a chance he may be sharing

BOXLEY. ONE ASSUMES THIS TIPSTER IS DEAN FALLON A.K.A. HARRY DEAN